



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 5
NOVEMBER 2018

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to bring to the Committee's attention the activity of the Leicestershire Fostering Service during the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. The Annual Report is attached as Appendix 1 to this paper.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Agency. It undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering.
3. Under the National Minimum Standards (NMS) 25.7 all Fostering agencies are required to provide a report to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the activity and work of the Fostering Agency and Fostering Panel.

Background

4. The County Council operates an integrated Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service. This arrangement has been in operation since April 2015 following a service review.
5. Whilst the services are combined, the Fostering Service is subject to its own set of standards, being a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Summary of the Report

6. The service recognises that it operates within a competitive market, with both surrounding local authorities and private providers of placements. As such, ambitious priorities and targets are set in the following areas:
 - Increasing Leicestershire's market share of mainstream foster carers
 - Reduction of young people requiring residential placements
 - Increase in the numbers of kinship carers
 - Increase the number of Supported Lodgings providers
 - Increase Leicestershire's specialist foster carers

- Ensuring carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care.
7. A range of work has been completed during 2017/18 in order to achieve the priorities as set out in the report. Performance in relation to recruitment and retention of foster carers is good. Points to note include:-
- There were 585 expressions of interest to become foster carers, of which 148 requested initial visits (i.e. to discuss in more detail). Arising from this there were 58 stage one assessments, and the eventual approval of 16 mainstream households (compared to 15 in 2016-17). Alongside this 6 other carer types were approved.
 - The Fostering Service had a 9% loss of foster carers compared to 12% nationally. 90% of foster carers said that they met often enough with their social worker, 76% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported by the service and 75% felt listened to by their social worker.

Resource Implications

8. The Fostering Service has a significant Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) savings target of £700,000 in 2018/19, rising to £2,900,000 in 2021/22 to be achieved by increasing Leicestershire's mainstream and specialist foster carer capacity and reducing reliance on external provision.

Conclusion

9. The Fostering Service has achieved significant success over the last year in the recruitment of foster carers in a competitive market. Within the context of the MTFS, increased in house provision is essential to providing high quality cost effective care for children. The investment in the Fostering Service is a priority to ensure a continued focus on recruiting and retaining in-house foster carers.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

10. None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

11. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18

Officers to Contact

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Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2017-2018



Our Service

Leicestershire County Council continues to operate a joint Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service. This arrangement has been in operation since April 2015 following a service review. Whilst we operate a joined up service we also ensure that the Fostering Service is subject to its own set of standards. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000.

Leicestershire County Council's carers are part of our fostering family. It is the service's aim to listen to our carers and to use their knowledge and experience to develop the service. And as a service we recognise the challenges carers face in meeting the needs of children with a range of additional and complex needs. In response to carers' feedback, over the last year we have separated the assessment and retention function within fostering to ensure that both service areas receive the same high level of support to both increase foster carer numbers and support our carers, recruitment processes have improved and pre and post approval support offers of training and retention enhanced.

A summary of other developments is provided below:

- The service has also consulted with carers regarding allowances and fees payments, with a view to implement a revised skills payment scheme from September 2018
- A dedicated post to support the recruitment and retention of Independent Visitors has been introduced
- Increased capacity to supervise Supported Lodgings carers as recruitment has exceeded expectations
- The Fostering Service is led by Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and Virtual School, managed through a Service Manager for Retention and a newly introduced Service Manager for Recruitment.

The demand for placements has continued to grow, with an increased demand for Parent and Child placements, sibling groups, care for teenagers and those with complex needs resulting from experiencing multiple traumas during their childhood or complex needs arising from disability. In order to meet the placement demands and to provide the range of carers to meet the needs of our children and young people, the service has worked with two consultants. The service values the oversight they brought and their insights into marketing and managing the recruitment pipeline.

The Recruitment and Retention Strategy is part of the overall Care Placement Strategy 2018-2021. It is a dynamic strategy, geared towards supporting the recruitment of new foster carers to meet the assessed needs as determined by the needs analysis; and is integrally linked with other key strategic plans and strategies for the Council:

- ✓ Children and Families Departmental Plan 2017 – 20

- ✓ Children & Families Partnership Plan
- ✓ Care Planning and Decision Making Guidance 2018
- ✓ Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2021
- ✓ Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017 – 2021
- ✓ Commissioning Strategy 2018- 2021

It is a dynamic strategy, geared towards supporting the recruitment of new foster carers to meet the assessed needs as determined by the needs analysis.

Other key linked planning documents are:

- Marketing Plan
- Market Position Statement
- Adoption and Permanence Strategy
- Therapeutic Wraparound Service Development Plan
- Commissioning Plan



Principles

- Where it is right to do so, all children will be supported to remain within the care of their families or communities with connected carers
- Where this is not possible, early permanence with adoptive families or foster carers will be sought to promote a sense of emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging

- Children and young people's voice will be respected and we will actively seek their engagement in decisions about their needs, their future and the provision of services
- High quality placements and provision of support to parents and carers to meet the needs of children and young people
- Where possible and right to do so, children and young people should be placed within Leicestershire with Leicestershire carers to maintain a sense of connectivity with their community
- Parents and carers are an integral part of the service, to be involved in planning for the child and service provision to ensure that the very best care is provided to our children and young people.

Objectives

- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement for looked after children in Leicestershire County Council, which will meet needs, and support good outcomes, now and into the future
- Meet the recruitment targets set out in section 3, which are reflective of the needs analysis
- Contribute to the Council savings of £2.2 M in Children's Services
- For all Children's Services employees to recognise their contribution to supporting the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers, and recognising their value as part of the professional service delivered to our children in care

The Service reports quarterly to our Departmental Management Team.

Our Identified Tasks from 2017/18 Annual Report

The service recognized that it operates within a competitive market, with both surrounding local authorities and private providers of placement. As such, ambitious priorities and targets were set in the following areas:

- Increasing Leicestershire's market share of mainstream foster carers
- Reduction of young people requiring residential placements
- Increase in the numbers of kinship carers
- Increase the number of Supported Lodgings providers
- Increase Leicestershire's specialist foster carers
- Ensuring our carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care.

A range of work was completed to achieve these priorities including:

- Increased and dedicated marketing support with an ambitious marketing plan focused on digital platforms and promoting Leicestershire County Council's beliefs and values represented by the new 'We are family' brand
- Specialist Carers Recruitment - Nationally, the recruitment of foster carers is challenging. Recruitment becomes more complex when foster carers are needed for children with particular needs like older children, those who have complex trauma needs, children with disabilities and those babies who require a placement with a parent. During 2017-18 the service continued its success in recruiting specialist carers called One2One and Pathway Carers. 2018-19 will see the launch of Supported Lodgings Plus, for young people requiring support from foster carers in their step down from residential placements on their transition to independence and long term One2One carers for young people with significant disabilities.
- Completion of a foster carers survey and a service improvement plan to address issues raised by carers including a revised training program
- Revised Payments Structure that recognises the skills, experience and commitment of foster carers and the role foster carers play in working with families in partnership with the Council. The payment scheme is based on the payment-for-skills principles recommended by the Fostering Network, and the Standards for Foster Care developed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to ensure that all foster carers receive induction, training and support, and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Provision of a Permanence Passport available to all staff that sets out the range of support and care to Children in Care
- Revised Foster Carer Handbook to promote understanding of advice, support and training available to carers
- Revised Foster Carers Review paperwork that draws to the fore the strengths and developmental areas of our carers and informs how best carers may support specific cohorts of children
- Revitalized the locality hub support (Peer to peer support, provision of information)
- The introduction of digital panels to improve efficiency and maximize panel activity
- Specialist Carers Support – The right support at the right time is very important to carers. One of the service's unique selling points is the Dedicated Placement Support Team, which is able to provide 24-7 support to carers when they need it most. The team aims to improve the skills, knowledge and competency of carers which has an overall impact on the wellbeing of children in their care and promotes placement stability
- The Dedicated Placement Support Team also introduced a dedicated officer in charge of recruiting, advising and arranging training for independent visitors who play a significant role in the emotional wellbeing of Children in Care
- The introduction of electronic Foster Carer Profiles – Children in Care told us that they would like these to be in a digital format, that they would like to have a virtual tour of the foster carers' home, and have it in video so they can see and hear the carers before they meet them. Although there is still some way to go to achieve this, the service is making progress

- The introduction of Recruitment and Retention Business Rules to ensure consistency of practice.



Fostering with Leicestershire – ‘We are Family’

Roles within the Fostering Service

The Service consists of the following teams:

- Recruitment – fostering and adoption
- Assessments – fostering and adoption
- Team around the Child
- Kinship
- Dedicated Placements Support.

There has been a significant investment in recruitment, and this is generating improved performance in relation to enquiries from prospective foster carers and adopters; increased numbers progressing to Initial Visits and to assessment. The Digital Strategy is central to marketing.

This includes:

- A largely digital marketing strategy
- A new website, geared towards the customer needs and experience for prospective foster carers
- Surveys and “keep in touch” mechanisms via electronic communications, to provide excellent customer service, and manage feedback.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to share information about fostering, and about what to expect, at each stage of the journey, including access to forms and training information.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to upload documents, for safe and confidential access, storage and visibility.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to read the Final Form F, and confirm amendments and agreement.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to become part of the Fostering Community In Leicestershire County Council, with access to information, events, policies, procedures, and forms.

The detailed Marketing Plan for 2018-21 underpins the activities to secure more Leicestershire Foster Carers and is available on request.

First Point of Contact – the Recruitment Team

1 Manager
1 Recruitment Officer
and
1 Business Support
Officer

There is a dedicated *Recruitment Team*, consisting of:

The Council has invested in a dedicated Recruitment Team, to enable and enhance the overall recruitment and experience of prospective foster carers. The priority for this team is to set out a friendly, informative, and welcoming first point of contact with the prospective carer, which meets their needs and impacts on the customer decision to select Leicestershire County Council, over other agencies, for their journey to foster.

Some key values and behaviours are essential for encouraging those ready to begin the journey to approval and those who may not yet be ready, but will choose to foster in the future. Research indicates that people typically take 2 years to contemplate and find out about fostering. Their initial contact will be highly influential in determining whether they will return to the Council when they are ready.



Values and Behaviour

- Positive, friendly and welcoming- recognising that people are usually apprehensive when making their first approach.
- Open and respectful. Anyone is free to make an enquiry. Even if fostering is not right for them, at this time, they may know someone for whom it is the right time.
- Positive and informative. The enquirer relies on the service to tell them about next steps, and provide more information about fostering.

Over the year they have provided the first port of call to all potential foster carers and adopters, working with our Communications team to encourage carers to approach Leicestershire by active recruitment campaigns via:

- Social media, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter campaigns
- Using Google Ad-words – attracting people to our website
- Local radio adverts
- Local media through regular press releases and radio interviews.
- Recruitment campaigns at local sporting events – Leicester Tigers and Leicester City
- Attending local events including ‘Leicester Pride’
- Targeted recruitment in specific Leicestershire target areas

We are proud members of:

Members of the public can choose from a variety of ways to get in touch, including telephone, email, by completing a form on the website, attending one of our events or sending a text message to the team. Our dedicated enquiry officer responds to enquiries promptly, aiming to be back in touch within 2 hours of the original enquiry (in working hours).



In January 2018, we launched our new, refreshed website along with our new strapline ‘**We are family**’. The ethos behind this is that Leicestershire County Council has so many strands of support within in, for example our social workers are based in local offices and have connections throughout the service. We have our ‘Virtual school’ which supports our children in care and as well as locality support groups for foster carers but above all, we can offer complete and whole rounded support to our carers due to the various departments involved with children in care, all being within the Local Authority. This is one of our main ‘unique selling points (USP) used effectively in campaigns. Our ‘Join our Family’ campaign continues to be successful.

The early part of 2018 included planning a change in process, with the introduction of Initial visit workers moving to be part of the recruitment team from April 2018.

We have used the opportunities to launch press releases and ensure our campaign are particularly strong within Fostering Fortnight, LGBT fostering & Adoption week as well as Sons and Daughters month to celebrate ‘fostering families and their children’ during October.

Our Recruitment Activity

This team is the first point of contact for people interested in becoming foster carers, either through telephone contact on our recruitment telephone line or through our many recruitment events run monthly at County Hall.

Over the year we had **585** initial expressions of interest in becoming foster carers, of which **148** requested initial visits, requiring a Stage One worker to visit their home to discuss in more detail the options around becoming a foster carer.

Of those **148** initial visits **59** converted in fostering applications and were progressed to Stage One. This resulted in **48** carers progressing to Stage Two, and **16** new households approved. This figure is lower than the previous year by one set of carers.

Snapshots of some of our most successful Fostering campaigns:

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

Simple things can really mean the most to a child in care. If you think you could make a difference to a child's life, we'd love to hear from you.

Fostering is...



...learning to ride my bike 

It's The Little Things That Count [Learn More](#)

FosteringLeicestershire.com

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

Could you open your heart and your home to a Leicestershire child in care? Find out how fostering with Leicestershire county council can fit around your family, work and life.





FosteringLeicestershire.com

Make a difference [LEARN MORE](#)

Find out about fostering

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

Did you know there's a type of fostering to suit most people? At Leicestershire County Council we strive to place children in areas they're familiar with, to ensure their lives are disrupted as little as... [More](#)







Children in Leicestershire need your help [Learn More](#)


fosteringleicestershire.com

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

 **Fostering in Leicestershire** Sponsored · 🌐

We're looking for excellent role models who are able to care for and support a new parent or young parent and their child





leicestershire.gov.uk

We'll support you all the way [CONTACT US](#)

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

In January 2018, we unveiled our newly branded website the public:

Leicestershire Fostering & Adoption



WE ARE FAMILY JOIN US

Already a foster carer? [JOIN US](#)

Be part of our Leicestershire fostering family

Who can foster?
Don't you just want to care for a child? Lots of people can foster. It's not just for parents.

Who can foster?
Most current foster carers for Leicestershire are at our events.

Fostering events
Find out about Fostering
Wednesday 1 February

Why foster with us?
As Leicestershire's Local Authority, all of the vital support departments are part of our family of services.

Find out why we're the first choice for foster carers in Leicestershire.

Why foster with us?

Get in touch
There are lots of ways to get in touch and find out more. We'd love to hear from you.

Contact details
Fostering Recruitment Team
0156 305 0505
Fostering@leicestershire.gov.uk
Enquiry form

Supporting you financially in your caring role

Payments and allowances
"Fostering is more than just about the money - it's the reward of making a difference to young lives that counts. However, in reality, we all have bills to pay, so it's vital that our carers are paid fairly."

See how much Leicestershire Fostering and Adoption Service pays.
[Find out more](#)

Supporting you on your fostering journey

Thanking of fostering?
Already a foster carer?
Just thinking about fostering and wondering how it could work for you and your family?
We can help.

Get in touch
Becoming a foster carer >
Transferring from another fostering agency >
Training and support for foster carers >

Ways to foster
You could make a difference to the lives of Leicestershire's children and young people. From a few hours to a few years.
See if you could fit fostering into your life.

Get in touch
Different ways to foster >
Private fostering >
Specialist foster care >
Fostering vacancies >

News
New foster carers set for fees boost
04 January 2018
Plans to bolster fostering recruitment to be discussed
Find out about fostering at event
04 December 2017
Recruits invited to 'find out about' ways to be a foster carer
Fostering event celebrates birth children
23 October 2017
Recruits urged to attend fostering events

Our 'Fostering' Events 2017/18

Our 'find out about fostering' events continued to be well attended throughout the year. The events are held in County Hall at 6.30pm in the evening and are advertised to the general public. Our events are relaxed and informal and provide an opportunity for people to come along to find out about fostering and hear from some of our foster carers what it's really like to be foster carer.



The event provides an opportunity for us to showcase the benefits of fostering with Leicestershire County Council, allowing us to focus on our 'unique selling points' for example, 'Leicestershire people caring for Leicestershire's children & young people' which emphasises that an opposed to fostering for an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) who may be placing children from all over the country with their carers, fostering with us means you will look after Leicestershire children – meaning local schools and contact visit – not in different counties.

Find out about Fostering events:

	20- Apr	11- May	31- May	22- Jun	12- Jul	3- Aug	23- Aug	14- Sep	4- Oct	26- Oct	15- Nov	7- Dec	18- Jan	8- Feb	28- Feb	22- Mar	Total	
Invited	17/18	16	18	16	20	13	16	19	21	13	19	31	13	42	25	21	34	337
Attended	17/18	21	15	12	11	10	9	12	12	7	11	10	6	16	10	7	9	178
Requested	17/18	11	12	8	9	9	8	10	8	5	8	5	4	15	9	7	9	137

178 People attended our 'Find out about fostering' events in 2016/17

137 People attending our events requested initial visits from the team.



Foster care fortnight 2017 (May 2017)

Our campaigns during Foster care fortnight were all supporting 'foster care fortnight' throughout our social media platforms:





LGBT adoption
& fostering week 5th – 11th
March 2018

The service sent out press releases to and welcomed people to our events during LGBT adoption and fostering week 2018.

Countdown to Christmas 2017 – Our Christmas campaign:

Our Christmas campaign was well received and gained a lot of extra ‘traffic ‘ to our Facebook page, Each ‘page like’ means that in future, our campaigns will reach that person for free – providing a long term saving. Our images were from our November 2017 photo shoot. Here are a few of them:



There has continued to be a demand for foster placements for the specific children and young people:

- Parent and child placements
- Siblings
- Teenagers
- Children with complex needs

Recruitment has focused on mainstream foster carer recruitment as well as specialist carers to meet this demand, such as

Pathway Carers – Another professional scheme whereupon the children and young people have a clear plan to be accommodated for a specified period whilst intensive work is undertaken to enable their return home. The carers work closely with the birth family and support them with behaviour management techniques, managing contact, working with education provision and health professionals.

Short Breaks – For carers wishing to provide respite care to children with disabilities for a minimum of one weekend per month.

Parent and Child Placements – There still continues to be a drive from the Courts for these placements, skilled carers who enable parents to be placed alongside their child whilst an assessment is undertaken.



The Journey has started- The Assessment Team

Following the restructure of our service in April 2015 our *Assessment Team* combined with the Adoption Assessing Team. The team currently assesses:

- Foster carers (mainstream and specialist)
- Step Parent adoptions
- Private Fostering Assessments
- Adopters
- Initial visits for Supported Lodgings

The Assessment Team consists of:



Should the prospective carer and the Fostering Agency agree to proceed after the initial enquiry to become a foster carer and the initial visit, the actual assessment (Form F Assessment) starts and will be completed in 16 weeks. This will be completed by an allocated social worker. Once a written assessment has been completed and the carer has been approved, this will become the carers fostering portfolio – it will be used to help match the carer with the right foster child.

In Leicestershire, Stage 1 and 2 assessments are merged to enable a better experience for prospective foster carers. In essence this means that the two assessments are separate but run as concurrent activities. This change, together with the use of external providers to complete assessments and increased focus on performance management will seek to reduce the length of time for assessment from point of initial visit to panel. The aim is to reduce time of completion from 7-9 months (2017-18 performance) to 4.5-6 months.

As of the end of March 2018 the Service had 119 approved mainstream carers including short-break, respite and emergency duty carers. During the year we approved 22 new carers, of whom 16 were mainstream foster carers. This resulted in a net decrease of 1 carer compared to the previous year. The service had anticipated loss of cares as a number of carers were approaching retirement. An overview of foster carer loss is as follows:

- 5 transferred to Special Guardianship Orders (permanence order made in favour of the child's foster carers)
- 5 deregistered carers due to practice/safeguarding concerns
- 10 carers resigned due to retirement or life changing circumstances.

The service has ambitious growth targets of 45 mainstream carers (net 25) and 8 specialist carers for 2018-19.



Panel and Approval

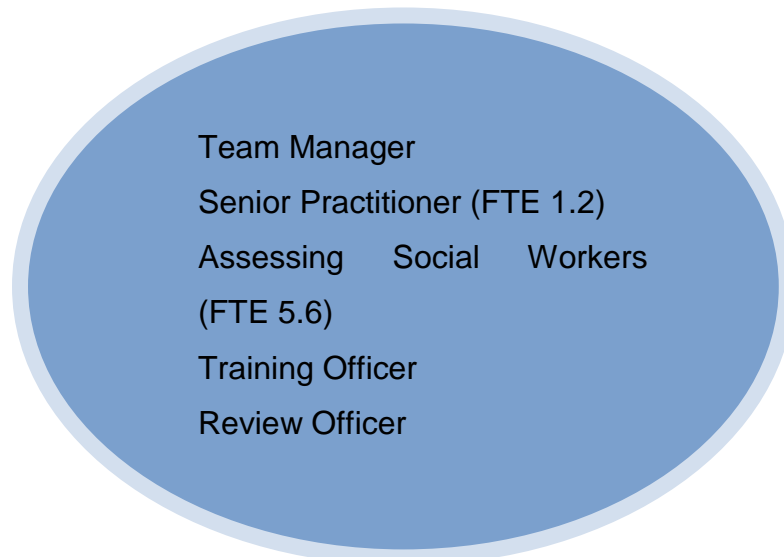
Leicestershire's Fostering Agency has an independent panel with a broad range of knowledge, skills and experience. As well as this expertise, members also have access to legal and medical advice if required.

In order to improve the efficient use of Panel time, the following actions will be taken in 2018-19:

- The date of presentation to Panel will be set at the start of the assessment, and will be written in to the assessment agreement, and recorded on the electronic system (MOSAIC)
- Approval will be confirmed by the Agency Decision Maker within 7 days of the Panel, and will be communicated to the Foster Carers by telephone and in writing
- Monthly meetings between the business lead (Service Manager for Marketing and Recruitment), the Service Manager for Permanence and the Panel Chair to identify and resolve workflow issues
- As Panel is shared with approval of Kinship (also known as Connected or Family and Friends) Carers, there will be review of how these assessments are completed and presented to Panel.

Supporting Leicestershire's Carers – Team Around the child

In Leicestershire, support is delivered through the *Team around the Child* which consists of:



[The Fostering System in England: Evidence Review](#) (Lawson and Cann, 2017) highlights the importance of support for foster carers, both formal support provided by the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and provided through other means including informal peer support, family and friends, support by the Child's Social Worker and Support Groups.

Lawson and Cann's survey of 2530 foster carers identified that foster carers feel that improved communication and support from the fostering service are the most important thing they would like to change to improve their lives as foster carers. The importance of support, feeling listened to, and valued are themes that run consistently through studies and research in relation to Foster care. It is vital therefore, that all parts of the Children's Services Department, and not only the Fostering Service, recognise the importance of the value of foster carers to the delivery of a safe and high quality foster care service.

In Leicestershire a foster carers' survey is sent out annually. In 2017, there was strong feedback from carers in relation to different questions regarding the support they receive. This is summarized below:

Over 90 % of foster carers felt they meet often enough with their social worker

Over 80% feel they can contact their social worker if required

75% feel listened to by their social worker, but less feel listened to by the service as a whole 76% of foster carers agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported by the service.

As a result of our survey in 2017 we have set priority actions for the forthcoming year to ensure the support and consultation we have with our carers continues. The service seeks to provide support in a range of ways, including social work supervision, newsletters, foster family events and locality support groups.

Areas of improvement that will continue into 2018-19 include:

- Peer Support - Foster carers in a Focus Group identified the value of the mentoring system for new foster carers put in place by the Service. In the Focus Group, foster carers reported differences in the information provided by their individual SSW about the mentoring scheme. As this has been raised as a valued aspect of the induction by new foster carers, the service has developed a new policy and will deliver a consistent approach to allocation of mentors;
- Respite - Foster carers identify respite care provision as an important support resource. Whilst only a small number of children have the complexity of need requiring respite, Leicestershire County Council acknowledges that respite promotes resilience. Respite may be an arrangement between the foster carer and their family/friendship circle in agreement with the supervising social worker; or afterschool, day care, sports, activities or a more formal provision like overnight stays provided by another foster carer. We recognise that activities like the ones described above, have added benefits for children and young people and will support respite provision as and when required;
- Education and Children in Care - Leicestershire County Council has a specific responsibility to support the educational achievement of Children in Care. Leicestershire's Virtual School promotes positive outcomes for all Children in Care wherever they are living or educated and supports schools and colleges to narrow the achievement gap. The Virtual school will work as part of the Children in Care and Fostering Service to promote higher aspirations and a greater understanding from all those involved in the education and care of Leicestershire's looked after children, including carers;

- Being valued, Being part of the Team around the Child - Foster Carers carry out a very important role in the understanding, assessment and care of the children placed with them. We believe that our foster carers should be included, involved in and contribute to decision making in relation to the child they care for.
- The Fostering Service has sought to address concerns raised by foster carers over a two year period (2015-16) about how they felt they were treated, particularly when significant decisions were made for the child they care for. The Service started this process by increasing consultation opportunities, listening, and acting on the feedback from foster carers.

The service has also developed different opportunities to engage with their carers:

- Monthly meetings with Locality Co-Ordinators
- Quarterly foster carer meetings with service leaders
- Fostering Craft and Family Fun Days
- Newsletter
- Annual Survey

The Kinship Team

The Kinship Team has continued to be extremely busy and numbers being referred for assessment continue to rise. During the last year, 84 assessments were completed. In terms of children placed under Reg. 24 of the Fostering Regulations, 37 placements were agreed (comprising single children, also sibling groups and parent and child placements).

Of these, 10 assessments had negative outcomes out of the 38 connected cases presented to the fostering panel. These negative outcomes, where children were placed, continue to raise particular issues as the Courts are extremely reluctant to agree removal of children unless there is immediate danger whilst other assessments are ongoing. It also means that placements can become unregulated unless the carers appeal via the IRM (Issues Resolution Meeting) process.

Quality assurances introduced during the year include:

- That Viability Assessments completed by locality Social Work teams will be signed off by locality Service Managers (whether the outcome of the Viability is positive or negative) to ensure checks and balances prior to these being submitted to the Kinship Team Manager, and then to the Head of Service, where there is a Reg. 24 placement
- The high numbers of assessments and the tight timescales involved have meant that the service has continued to commission external assessments to meet tight timescale and volume demands. Senior managers are aware of this ongoing issue and the cost implications of this as opposed to having permanent staff within the team.

Fostering Panel activity has reflected the large number of cases coming through and this can raise issues in terms of capacity. In terms of Reg. 24 placements, the regulations allow for 16 weeks to complete assessments with a possibility of an 8 week extension if checks are not complete. However, the reality is that most assessments are completed under much tighter timescales than this with the most difficult this year being an assessment due to be completed in 5 weeks.

The staffing in the Kinship Team has recently been affected by long term of several workers and the team manager leaving to take another post. However, vacant posts continue to attract a high degree of interest from experienced staff.

The team also currently has 1.6 FTE Supervising Social Workers – currently these workers are holding 23 and 26 carers. Recent activity from the courts, delaying the making of permanency orders such as Special Guardianship Orders, until after a child, or children, are established for a period of time in placement has contributed significantly to this increase (with a number of very young children made subject to Full Care Orders). This is now tracked through Permanency Panel.

Regular events for kinship carers have continued to be held throughout the year and kinship carers can also access all training open to mainstream carers and they are expected to complete the Fostering Standards. In addition to this newsletters are used to communicate to all foster carers and SGO carers.

Retention overview

On the whole, foster carers feedback through surveys completed in 2016 and 2017 tell us that our efforts to listen and be more responsive have been successful; and the number of reported concerns has reduced.

Retention in the context of fostering means that the service will consciously engage in activities that create the kind of relationships and environment that supports our current foster carers to continue supporting children through Leicestershire County Council.

The DFE Review of Foster Care (2017) highlights a number of issues that relate to retention of foster carers. The national evidence identifies that most foster carers leave the service to retire. The workforce is an ageing workforce, and this issue is projected to continue. Other key reasons identified are a change of circumstances, adopting a child placed, and allegations against foster carers.

Our foster carers tell us that this means:

- Keeping supervising social workers' caseloads low so that foster carers have a good level of support and advice
- Ensuring training is relevant to the needs of the children
- Continually listening and involving foster carers in shaping the service.

“There are more young people in long-term foster care than ever before, and we need to recognise that as a permanent option and make sure the resources and support are there to support the carers, and that is whatever the legal status,” Community Cares, Oct 4 2017



The service lost 24 foster carers in 2016-17, which equated to 14% of the foster carer population. National benchmarking identifies an average 12% loss, and the service projected a 13 % loss per annum, based on the age of the foster carer population in 2015-16. The service was pleased to find that 2017-18 saw only a 9% loss of all carers.

An overview of foster carer loss is as follows:

- 5 transferred to Special Guardianship Orders (permanence order made in favour of the child’s foster carers)
- 5 deregistered carers due to practice/safeguarding concerns
- 10 carers resigned due to retirement or life changing circumstances.

The most recent research identifies that foster carers remain fostering for an average 7.8 years. The Fostering Agency is very proud to have carers who have provided a service through Leicestershire County Council for over 40 years. We are immensely proud to have worked with them.

Fees and Allowances

Payments to foster carers are a significant element of the support and retention plan for fostering. The DFE review highlights that while fees are not a major issue for recruitment, the reward to foster carers for their role is key in retention. This is supported by findings from Fostering Network and our foster carer surveys completed in 2016 and 2017.

In Leicestershire County Council, a review of fees to foster carers progressed in 2017 and a new payment structure was agreed by the Cabinet in July 2018 following a public consultation on proposed changes.

Our Training

Foster carers are prepared for the role in pre-approval training through the Skills to Foster and continue to receive specific training through their development and additional, child specific training.

Whilst studies setting out to evidence the impact of training on the foster care provided are not conclusive, it is clear that training is valued and important part of the support, preparation and development of foster carers, including specialist foster

carers. Many of the foster carers in the 2017 Leicestershire CC Foster Carer Survey identified that training was strength of the service, and 61% of respondents cited this within their top 3 issues they valued about the service.

A strong, [training programme](#) has been designed to match the learning and development needs of the foster carer population and NMS and the services has expand the training offer. The service has achieved this by developing our On-Line Portal. This means that carers can complete training in a more flexible manner. In addition to a set program of learning offers, the on line portal also has monthly training themes where carers in their own time can develop their skills and knowledge in key areas – child development, self- harm.

Our training programme has expanded to offer more advanced and varied to meet the various placement types

We have also combined some training events to include both kinship and Special Guardians.



This allowed the training to be more inclusive and brings in different perspectives. Our use of feedback from every event helps develop the training programme.

The programme is reviewed annually with feedback from carers and should be seen as an essential part of the retention package for foster care. The training is relevant for both new and more experienced carers. For 2017/18 the service is developing more training events focusing on therapeutic parenting.

Our use of feedback from every event helps develop the training program and provide bespoke training to our specialist training.



We have a dedicated training co-ordinator for the service who delivers training for all our carers both mainstream and kinship. In addition to our Core Training we also provide:

- 80 e-learning courses (for carers in the home or libraries)
- 40 live courses in venues booked by the Training Officer.
- CAMHS training
- LGBT, Therapeutic Parenting, Life Story Work, Communication and Language, Drug Awareness, Alcohol Awareness, NHS Fayre and Fire & Road Safety Awareness
- TSD's by a paper assessment or an online assessment as well as the option to do it on by mobile phone
- Level 3 Diploma for the CYPW at the carer's home.
- NHS Diana training for short break carers

Feedback/ Evaluations on training

- Evaluations are completed at the end of every training session by every carer and uploaded to each carer's records. They are evaluated by the trainer as well as the training officer and any issues, developments noted and actioned and are very relevant to assess and evaluate our current training courses.
- Trainers are also invited to provide feedback in order to gauge their experience with our venues/carers etc. which again are actioned and reported where necessary.

- We are currently designing a new feedback form to scale the learner's progress and knowledge from the beginning of the training to the end of the training session.

Our Plans for the forthcoming year

- Working closer with the Virtual School, Caring About Reading Scheme and the libraries to create some carers and child focused training and links the training & events organised by the Corporate Parents Team
- Developing a new Child Sexual Exploitation programme to offer carers a day's training with young people in the Warning Zone in Leicester
- Working with Leicester City to organise joint training/skills/workshops for kinship carers.
- Developing post support for Adoption & SGO with Turning Point on Drug & Alcohol services & the Virtual School
- Develop the Kinship/SGO support groups & events further
- Complete the Learning Hub for all carers by the end of 2017

The Dedicated Placement Support Team

Leicestershire's *Dedicated Placement Support Team* has been in operation for two years. This team is able to support foster placements to promote stability, support our specialist One2One, Pathway carers and young people in Staying Put and Supported lodgings arrangements.

The team consists of:



The team is responsible for:

- Improve placement stability for young people living in foster care who present the most challenging behaviour
- To work with our specialist foster carers, mainstream foster carers and residential placements to return children home. This includes working intensively with families and young people and other professionals including the child's Social Worker, preparing return home trajectories and offering support at evenings and weekends when necessary
- Managing behaviours, what is normal teenage/child age related behaviour and what behaviours cause concern and offering direct work with the young people. This can include concerns that arise because of child sexual exploitation, self-esteem, friendships, and supporting young people and carers with CAMHS meetings.
- Work with carers to maintain placements stability and prevent placement breakdown.

Measure of success in March 2017-18:

- The main purpose of our team is to stabilise placement when difficulties arise and return young people home when this is identified in their care plan. Over the last year placement stability has improved by **5%**
- **Seven young people** have managed to remain within their current placement with intervention from support workers from the team
- **Seven young people** have returned home from either foster care or residential placements.
- 13 young people and their carers, who have Special Guardianship Orders, were supported to settle in to their new homes.
- **Three young people** have remained at home with their parents after they had spent time in care previously but the family were experiencing difficulties with behaviours.
- Each worker should have a **caseload of 5** to be able to offer the intense work needed, however this continues to grow as the demand for support has increased. At times the caseload has increased to **8 per worker**.
- Two Social workers with specific responsibility for the Supported Lodgings Scheme and Staying Put. Although this role is a specific role within Fostering as a regulated service we feel in order to maintain a smooth transition for our young people we need to retain oversight with workers who have been known to the young people, and carers who receive bespoke support.

- The service had **19** Supported Lodgings Providers with **18** young people in placement.
- **5** prospective Supported Lodgings in
- **8** young people who have Stayed Put in their foster placements
- **90%** of our young people in Supported Lodgings have remained stable in their placement
- **3** young people have moved into Supported Lodgings from Residential Placements, out of County, and are all stable at present
- We successfully recruited a further **2** One2One carers, bringing the total of one2one carers to **4**. Of which, one provides respite to our One2One carers
- The Supervising Social Worker works closely with the child's Social Worker and the team around the child, this includes CAMHS. At present there is a system whereby foster carers can book sessions through their Supervising Social Worker to discuss the child's mental health and any presenting behaviours
- We have recently commissioned MISTLE who are a team who work alongside the department and look at embedding therapeutic parenting with our foster carers, with a priority focus for young people placed in residential placements
- The team have also organised Easter and Xmas craft events and A Fostering Family Fun Day
- Feedback from the carers and young remain positive the main aspects around the support workers being available out of hours, being creative in their working with young people.

Next steps:

- We have developed a new foster carer profile for a scheme called Pathway Carers – Young people who come into care at an older age (14 plus), who have a strong sense of family and do not want to feel that they have to invest in another family, or maybe young people who are in their final school year or who are moving from residential care back into Leicestershire. We are hoping that this scheme will enable young people to have a level of independence but also the security of knowing that they have support and guidance that will make their transition into adulthood smooth. These young people may require an extra level of supervision and support that is not offered with our current mainstream foster carers

- The recruitment of long term One2One care for children with disabilities
- The recruit of 3 new Supported Lodgings Providers per year, which we are on track to achieve. At present we have 4 people undertaking assessments to become Supported Lodgings Providers
- There are 2 pathway carers currently undergoing assessments who will work with teenagers on a longer term basis
- The priority challenges the services faces are streamlining referrals, presenting a business case for a Senior Practitioner for the team and ensuring that all caseloads are manageable.

Report from the Independent Reviewing Officer

“We recognise the good practice of holding reviews following concerns and this has been fully implemented within Leicestershire over the last year. This has been met with some concern from carers as they presumed this would mean they would be de-registered, but through the review process carers recognise that this approach supports transparency, learning and how to support both carers and the children or young people in their care. In some cases where there has been significant concern there will be a recommendation of a change of approval or de-registration.

During 2017- 2018 12 reviews took place because of concerns about practice. Of those 5 recommended de-registration to Panel.

The service is in the process of amending the review paperwork to ensure the “Lived Experience” of the looked after child, the birth children and the carers are heard. The service recognised our previous paperwork held many closed questions and so inhibited responses. I have worked with both the Team around the Child Manager and Service Manager to review and develop this. This will be piloted in October 2018. As the voice of the lived experience is so important in shaping our service this will be launched to the Children and Young Peoples Service Managers to ensure all areas of child care are engaged and fully understand their role in participation. We have also improved in the feedback we receive from the Childrens Social Worker, developing a monitoring system to highlight when they have not been received and a process to raise this. This area of work will continue to be developed as we now monitor which workers are compliant.

In January 2018 there was a consultation regarding fostering fees .On the whole carers have welcomed this initiative and the opportunity to move onto a higher fee level. Importantly this has now recognised our kinship carers for the contribution they make to children’s lives and the service. There have however been some carers who are worried about what the impact of the consultation will be for them as they have been in receipt of additional funding for specific placements.

Supervising Social Workers continue to work towards obtaining AH/AH2 (Adult Health) reports prior to the review. This up to date health information can then inform the Review. We have experienced difficulties in carers being able to book

their medicals with GP surgeries as many now require payments up front. The service is trying valiantly to ease this process for carers.

On the whole foster carers continue to feel there is now more stability in the fostering service and welcome the events the service provides to carers. In particular they have enjoyed the Recognition Events held at the Hilton Hotel, and the Activity Days in the holidays.

From September 2018, I will be taking over first reviews, prior to their attendance at Panel. It was felt that the Reviewing Officer's oversight was required for consistency and good practice."

Our Foster Panel

The Fostering Panel is established and acts in accordance with the regulatory framework provided by The Fostering Service Regulations 2011, Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011 and the Standards set out in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. The Foster Panel takes account of the legislation set out in The Children Act 1989 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Guidance, volume 2, 2010.

The Fostering Panel has the responsibility for making **recommendations** in relation to:

- The approval of mainstream foster carers
- The approval of family members or friends as "connected person" carers for children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council and connected to the applicant as a family member or friend
- The first annual review of all foster carers and connected persons carers
- Reviews of carers where there have been serious issues such as Child Protection Investigations, or
- Reviews of carers where there are concerns regarding their fostering practice and their suitability.

Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) 2011 Constitution & Membership of Fostering Panel

The current membership of the panel is as follows:

Arlene Weekes	Independent Chair
Tony Richardson and Mohamed Patel	Independent Vice-Chairs
Lorraine Daniels, and Ashley Scott	Independent Social Worker Representatives
Steph Beeston Clark	Foster Carer Representative
Catherine Thompson	Foster Carer Representative
Kendall Concannon	Foster Carer Representative
Margret Atkinson	Independent Member
Anne Bridge	Independent Member

Amanda Hales	Independent Member
Thure Johansen	Independent Member
Jacinta Barnard	Independent Members
Fiona Booth	Independent Members
Rebecca Peters	LCC Social Worker
Annmarie Reid	LCC Social Worker
Anesha Daria	LCC Social Worker
Natashar Chimwaza	LCC Social Worker
Ann Barton	LCC Social Worker
Rachael Young	LCC Social Worker
Deborah Taylor	County Councillor
Dhiraj (Nilesh) Raithatha	LCC employee

Currently both Vice-Chairs are independent of the Fostering Agency.

In 2017/18, there have been no issues regarding quoracy and the Panel Advisor has ensured that all business has been facilitated.

The current Panel Advisor has reviewed the volume and cost of panel business given the additional panels that have been required and in particular the growth in connected person cases. As a result, the schedule of panel meetings has been altered in order to meet this demand. There are now two Fostering Panels each month. This allows for additional connected person cases to be allocated panel time to meet the 16-24 week timescale.

The Panel receives medical advice within the Social Workers reports and this is considered within the assessments.

Regarding the workload of the Panel, the Panel met on 26 occasions between April 2017 to March 2018, an increase on the previous year's 24 occasions.

This number is expected to grow over the next year in line with the service's marketing and recruitment strategy and the growing demands of assessing connected carers.

In relation to Panel administration, the Panel continues to receive a high standard of administrative support, which has been instrumental in developing processes to ensure that the Panel papers, minutes and time keeping are adhered to. This has been enhanced by the development of digital panels enabling papers to be sent electronically improving both data security, timeliness of reports and removing the need to print excessive paperwork.

Panel actively seeks feedback from all participants and is received via a feedback form. The feedback is reviewed by the Panel Advisor and Chair. The Panel Advisor has reviewed the feedback information from those attending Panel. The feedback is then provided to the following panel for their consideration.

Panel Quality Assurance

The reports for Panel are signed as being suitable to present at Panel by the Team Manager of the specific team to ensure suitable quality standards are achieved. A key development via the Panel feedback process has been to generate a pro forma for approval based upon the Fostering Standards.

The panel adviser works closely with the managers of the service to ensure the quality assurance of reports is undertaken in a timely manner. If reports do not have the required paperwork to enable panel to make a recommendation they will be removed from the panel agenda.

The service continues to have quarterly agency feedback meetings with the service. This has enabled further discussion around practice and areas for development and has encompassed the use of Signs of Safety to consider the work of the Agency and Panel. We also deliver annual training to our fostering panel to ensure they are up to date with any service developments, new legislation or new fostering schemes.

There continues to be an improvement in the quality of reports presented to panel and this has been assisted by the Panel Advisor actively engaging with the managers of the service to reiterate the need for sound, evidence based assessments. There is clear evidence of the Signs of Safety model in assessments in terms of the strengths and vulnerabilities of applicants. The Panel Advisor attends the managers meeting for a specified time at each meeting to feedback any issues arising from panel.

The Panel Advisor and Panel Chairs continue to develop a working relationship which offers support and challenge where appropriate. This encourages transparency and openness within all Panel business and this is reflected through the work with the Panel and the service.

The Independent Visitor Service

The service supports children in care up to the age of 21. The service currently has **31** approved independent visitors, with a further **3** recently approved. There are a further **7** applicants being assessed. A target of 21 additional independent visitors has been agreed by the end of March 2019. Recruitment of male independent visitors continues to be a challenge nationally, but the service is working hard to try to address this.

New practice standards and updated Policy, Procedure and staff guidance has recently been approved for the service. There is a robust development plan in place for future development of the service.

The Foster Carer Association

The Leicestershire Foster Carer Association (LFCA) has been running for a number of years. This followed the establishment of a committee who had determined the areas where foster carers and their families could be better supported.

Many of our LFCA have fostered for the service for a number of years and despite active recruitment campaigns carers have sought to attend local support groups rather than become a member of the LFCA. As a service we recognize the role of the LFCA and will seek to re-establish this in the forthcoming year. Over recent years the numbers within the LFCA have reduced and there is active recruitment in place to encourage further participation.

Our Locality Support Groups

Within Leicestershire we continue to have very active Locality Support Groups based over the County for our carers to attend.

This year the service has seen the development of new branches across the county as new carers are engaged with the groups. This has also led to specific groups for kinship carers. Most meet on a monthly basis, they are very social groups and are facilitated by the carers. Details of the meeting times are advertised in our Newsletter. When a new carer is approved their details are provided to the co-ordinator to make contact and welcome to the support group.

The service has have supported the locality support groups to hold Christmas Parties, trips to local theme parks and other social events. The service recognises these events as being important to promote a broader 'We are family' culture, to build informal networks of support.

Both the Service Manager and Team Manager of The Team around the Child attend the groups to consult with carers and be available to discuss any issues carers wish to discuss.

During 2017-18 some carers fed back that some groups felt negative and they did not gain anything from their attendance. We listened to their concerns and in response now offer quarterly co-ordinator meetings to provide support and learn from the good practice of the established locality groups. We also now offer quarterly open meetings at County Hall where any carer can drop in and meet the managers and workers from the service. These sessions offer both a training and social element, with many carers of babies/young children having their charges with them. These are enjoyable events for both the staff and carers.

Complaints and Allegations

Last year we received 2 complaints, which is significantly lower than previous years. They were in relation to:

- A birth parent unhappy that a foster carer had a CCTV camera
- A foster carer being taken through the allegation process and complaining of lack of support

We also had 8 allegations, of those:

- All were referred to LADO
- Of those 4 had an outcome of no further action

- 4 led to Position of Trust Meetings which led to Reviews Following Concerns
- Of those 2 households were de-registered
- Of those 1 carer resigned
- The final carer continued to foster with revised Terms of Approval.

As the managers of the service meet with foster carers through locality meetings and individual appointments any low level concerns and issues are managed quickly and efficiently preventing the carers needing to progress to complaints.

Our Quality Assurance

Within the service we constantly seek ways to improve the service we provide to our children and families.

As a service we have team Storyboards identifying:

- Where we were (our current position)
- What we have done
- What difference has this made
- What are our next steps

This has enabled teams to identify learning, resources, and performance targets to improve the service.

Within the service we have an agreed auditing schedule:

Service Manager – 4 Themed audits per year

Team Managers – 1 Case file audit per month

The audits are then used to develop the key areas within the service.

The findings from the audits are then presented back to the team with a timeline of improvements.

The audits form part of the departmental Quality Assurance Strategy, to consistently raise practice through the use of effective management oversight.

Our scheduled audits for this year include:

- Chronologies
- Voice and Choice
- Review of chronologies
- Foster carer reviews

A Final Word from the Service Manager, Joss Longman

“The last year has been very busy, the number of looked after children has increased, and so has the pressure on placements. We have continued to develop

the service and have implemented many new initiatives. Whilst we continue to offer our support to both potential and approved foster carers we will develop our reporting systems to ensure that all areas of our service are able to have reporting systems to allow for our performance data to be accessible.

Priorities for next year include:

- Implementation of our new payment scheme to carers
- Increasing the numbers of in-house mainstream and specialist carers
- Developing a specialist carers scheme for children with disabilities
- Strengthening our Parent and Child Carers Scheme
- Strengthening out Staying Put Carers and
- Embedding our enhanced independent visiting offer.”

Joss Longman, Service Manager, Fostering Service